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ABSTRACT

A study reviewed the Adult Education Act's (AEA's) largest program--the State Grant Program, its coordination with federal employment training programs, and the extent to which the program ensured accountability for program quality and results. The study relied on national data in conducting its review and performed more detailed work in three states--California, Connecticut, and Iowa. Findings indicate that the goals of the AEA are broad and include citizenship and employment as well as the overall improvement of the adult education system. The most common types of instruction funded under the State Grant Program were basic education, secondary education, and English as a Second Language. Because many clients of federal employment training programs needed instruction provided by the State Grant Program, coordination among these programs was essential. Although the State Grant Program funded programs that addressed the educational needs of millions of adults, it had difficulty ensuring accountability for results because of a lack of clearly defined program objectives, questionable validity of adult student assessments, and poor student data. Experts disagreed about whether developing indicators of program quality will help the states. (Appendixes include State Grant Program budget and enrollment data, comments from the Department of Education.) (YLB)

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United States General Accounting Office

GAO

Report to Congressional Requesters

September 1995

ADULT EDUCATION

Measuring Program Results Has Been Challenging

ED 386 541

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GAO

United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Health, Education, and
Human Services Division

B-259608

September 8, 1995

The Honorable William F. Goodling
Chairman
The Honorable William L. Clay
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Economic and
Educational Opportunities
House of Representatives

The Honorable Randy (Duke) Cunningham
Chairman
The Honorable Dale E. Kildee
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Early Childhood,
Youth and Families
Committee on Economic and
Educational Opportunities
House of Representatives

The Adult Education Act (AEA) represents the primary federal effort to improve the literacy skills of educationally disadvantaged adults. Programs funded under the AEA are also important in providing the basic skills needed by many clients of federal employment training programs.

This report responds to a request from the former House Committee on Education and Labor and its Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education that we review several issues in anticipation of the AEA's reauthorization. In subsequent discussions with your staff, we agreed to provide information on the AEA's largest program (the State Grant Program), its coordination with federal employment training programs, and the extent to which it ensures accountability for results.

We are sending copies of this report to the Secretaries of Education, Health and Human Services, and Labor, as well as interested congressional committees. Copies will be made available to others upon request. Major contributors to this report are listed in appendix III. If you have any questions, please call me at (202) 512-7014.

Linda G. Morra
Director, Education and
Employment Issues

Executive Summary

Purpose

Nearly 90 million adults in the United States have deficient literacy skills, according to a recent national survey. These adults may not be able to write a letter explaining an error on a credit card bill, use a bus schedule to determine which bus to take, or calculate the difference between the regular and sale price of an item. Deficient literacy skills, however, are not just an individual concern. Adult literacy problems also threaten the nation's economy, which depends on increasingly high levels of workplace skills to remain competitive in a global market.

The Congress passed the Adult Education Act (AEA) to, among other things, help states fund programs for adults to acquire the basic skills needed for literate functioning, benefit from job training, and continue their education through at least high school. The AEA was last reauthorized in 1991. In anticipation of its next reauthorization, the former House Committee on Education and Labor and its Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education requested that GAO provide information on (1) the AEA's largest program—the State Grant Program—and its coordination with federal employment training programs and (2) the extent to which the program ensures accountability for program quality and results. GAO relied on national data in conducting its review and performed more detailed work in three states—California, Connecticut, and Iowa.

Background

Programs funded under the AEA are administered by the Department of Education. For the State Grant Program, the Department makes grants to states on the basis of the number of people in each state who are at least 16 years old, not required to be in school, and lack a high school degree. Local adult education providers apply to the states for funds. The Department of Education reported that, in fiscal year 1995, about 4 million adults were enrolled in classes funded by the State Grant Program; federal funding was $252 million, and state and local sources provided an additional $890 million. Although total current state and local contributions far exceed federal expenditures, federal dollars still total more than half the adult education funds in almost half of the states.

Programs funded under the AEA are important in providing the basic literacy skills needed by clients of federal employment training programs administered by the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Labor. Thus, the AEA and employment training legislation require coordination among these programs to avoid duplication and enhance service delivery.

The federal role in administering programs funded under the AEA may soon change. The 104th Congress is considering legislation that would consolidate adult education and other programs and provide one or more block grants to states. The Senate bill would repeal most existing federal employment training programs, as well as the State Grant Program, and replace them with a single block grant. The House bill would also repeal most employment training programs but would replace them with four block grants, including a separate grant for adult education and literacy programs.

Results in Brief

The goals of the AEA, which encompasses the State Grant Program, are broad to enable people with diverse needs to receive varying types of instruction. The most common types of instruction funded under the State Grant Program are basic education (for adults functioning below the eighth grade level), secondary education, and English as a Second Language. Because many clients of federal employment training programs need instruction provided by the State Grant Program, coordination among these programs is essential.

Although the State Grant Program funds programs that address the educational needs of millions of adults, it has had difficulty ensuring accountability for results because of a lack of clearly defined program objectives, questionable validity of adult student assessments, and poor student data. Amendments to the AEA required the Department of Education to improve accountability by developing model indicators of program quality that states could adopt and use to evaluate local programs. However, experts disagree about whether developing indicators would help states to define measurable program objectives or evaluate local programs and collect more accurate data. Other federal efforts may help states achieve better accountability systems, but it is too soon to evaluate their effectiveness.

Principal Findings

Largest Program Strives to Meet Many Goals and Needs

The AEA's and the State Grant Program's goals include assisting adults who lack the basic literacy skills needed for effective citizenship, productive employment, and high school completion. Many clients of federal employment training programs need the basic skills taught in adult

education classes. For example, almost 30 percent of the participants in the Department of Labor's Job Training Partnership Act Program are school dropouts; as many as 50 percent may lack basic skills.

In accordance with their federally approved plans, states fund local organizations to provide varying services to a wide range of adults. For example, in one community we visited, a 19-year-old mother with a tenth grade education was taking basic skills classes so that she could complete high school and become a cosmetologist, a 28-year-old stock clerk was taking high school equivalency classes with the hope of going to college and becoming a police officer, and a 62-year-old immigrant who had been an accountant in Russia was enrolled in English classes so that she could become a U.S. citizen.

In further keeping with state plans, which call for coordinating adult education with employment training programs, a variety of coordination activities were taking place in the states and communities we visited. These activities included pooling funds, establishing one-stop centers, and developing uniform assessment systems. For example, one state pooled funds from many sources for coordinated grants that, among having other advantages, enabled service providers to respond to a single request for proposal.

Ensuring Program Accountability Has Proven Difficult

Evaluating program results depends on having clearly defined objectives, valid assessment instruments, and accurate program data. Some program officials and experts have raised concerns that, because the State Grant Program lacks clearly defined objectives, the types of skills and knowledge adults need to be considered literate are not clear and, thus, states do not have sufficient direction for measuring results. In addition, some research has questioned the validity and appropriateness of the student assessments used in adult education programs and, therefore, the usefulness of the data generated from these assessments. In the states we visited, local program officials had mixed views of the assessment instruments the states required them to use. Finally, missing and inaccurate data may compromise any attempt to improve program accountability. Federal and state officials acknowledged serious problems with the data that states report to the Department of Education. Recent studies have attributed difficulties in obtaining accurate data to the sporadic attendance patterns of adult students and the limited time and expertise of local adult education program staff.

Federal efforts to improve accountability have focused on developing indicators of program quality, providing technical assistance to states, and requiring states to set aside funds for demonstration projects and training. The Department of Education has developed model indicators in eight areas, including student outcomes, and provided examples of measures that could be used to quantify performance in these areas. And, as required, states have adopted the indicators or developed their own to use to evaluate local programs. Experts and some program officials, however, have had mixed views about whether the indicators would help states evaluate local programs or collect better quality data. Because the 1993-94 program year was the first year the indicators were required to be used for evaluation, it is too soon to tell whether the indicators will lead to improvements. It is also too early to assess whether the Department's technical assistance efforts or the state set-asides for demonstration projects and training will help states develop better accountability systems.

Recommendations

GAO is making no recommendations in this report.

Agency Comments

The Department of Education provided written comments on a draft of this report. The Department recognized that GAO identified the three areas that are critically important to improving accountability in adult education: clear purpose and expectations, good assessment instruments, and high-quality data. The Department also stated its commitment to improving program accountability through several current initiatives, such as developing an individualized student record keeping system and training programs for adult education staff in collecting, analyzing, and reporting student program data. (See app. II for the Department's letter.)

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Abbreviations

ABE	Adult Basic Education
AEA	Adult Education Act
ASE	Adult Secondary Education
CASAS	Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System
ESL	English as a Second Language
GED	General Educational Development
JOBS	Job Opportunities and Basic Skills
JTPA	Job Training Partnership Act
VOC ED	Perkins Vocational Education

Chapter 1

Introduction

The National Adult Literacy Survey[1] estimated that approximately 90 million American adults have deficient literacy skills. Of those, between 40 and 44 million adults—about 22 percent of the country's adult population—have severe problems with literacy, defined as the ability to read, write, and speak English and compute and solve problems proficiently. An additional 50 million adults are likely to encounter some problems functioning in society and need improved literacy skills.

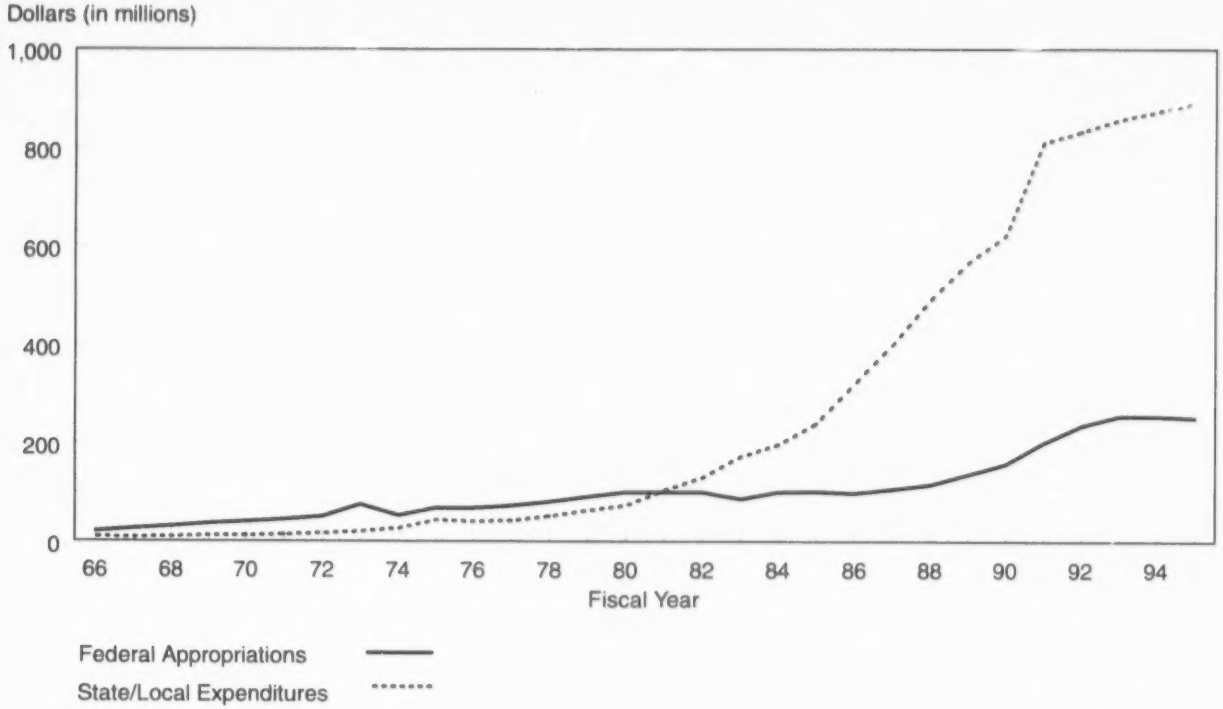
The Adult Education Act[2] (AEA) is administered by the Department of Education. The act represents the primary federal effort to alleviate problems in adult literacy and provides the basic legislative authority and largest source of federal funds for programs that benefit educationally disadvantaged adults.[3] The act's largest program is the Adult Education State-Administered Basic Grant Program (State Grant Program). In fiscal year 1995, federal funding for this program was $252 million, while state and local sources provided $890 million, or 78 percent of the program's total budget. For the first 15 years of the State Grant Program (1966 to 1980), federal expenditures exceeded total state and local contributions; however, total state and local contributions have since surpassed federal expenditures. (See table I.2 in app. I for total annual expenditures.) Figure 1.1 compares federal expenditures with state and local expenditures since the AEA's passage in 1966.

[1]This 1992 survey profiled the literacy of U.S. adults on the basis of their performance in a wide array of tasks that reflect the types of materials and demands they encounter in their daily lives. The Department of Education contracted with the Educational Testing Service to conduct this survey.

[2]The AEA was originally passed as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Amendments of 1966 (P.L. 89-750) and was rewritten as part of the Augustus F. Hawkins-Robert T. Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments of 1988 (P.L. 100-297).

[3]These are adults who demonstrate basic skills equivalent to or below that of students at the fifth grade level.

Figure 1.1: Comparison of Federal Expenditures With State and Local Expenditures, Fiscal Years 1966-1995



Note: This figure reflects federal appropriations data because federal expenditure data were not readily available. According to Department of Education officials, appropriations and expenditure data for the program tend to be virtually the same. For fiscal years 1992 to 1995, state and local expenditures were estimated.

Source: U.S. Department of Education.

Although total state and local contributions currently far exceed federal expenditures, federal dollars still total more than half the funds for adult education in almost half of the states. The contribution of each state relative to the federal contribution varies widely, depending on each state's commitment to providing adult education services. For example, in fiscal year 1991,[4] state and local contributions ranged from a low of

[4]According to the Department of Education, this is the most recent year for which expenditure data are available (obligation authority was from July 1, 1991, to June/Sept. 30, 1993).

21 percent to a high of 96 percent; conversely, federal expenditures ranged from 4 to 79 percent. Since 1992, the AEA has restricted the federal share of each state's expenditure to no more than 75 percent. (See table I.4 in app. I for further information on expenditures by state.)

The AEA makes grants to states and requires that they be used in accordance with federally approved state plans. In developing their plans, states must assess the needs of adults, including educationally disadvantaged adults, and the capability of programs and institutions to meet those needs. The Department of Education annually makes its grants to states[5] on the basis of the number of individuals in each state who are at least 16 years old, not enrolled in school, and lack a high school degree or General Educational Development (GED) credential.[6] Local adult education providers then apply to the states for funds.

Following are the three most common types of instruction offered under the State Grant Program:

- Adult Basic Education (ABE), which is instruction designed for adults functioning below the eighth grade level;
- Adult Secondary Education (ASE), which is instruction designed for adults functioning at the secondary level that may culminate in a high school diploma or may serve as preparation for the GED[7] examination; and
- English as a Second Language (ESL), which is instruction designed to teach English to non-English speakers.

(See table I.3 in app. I for further information on enrollment by instructional area.)

Programs funded under the AEA are important in providing basic literacy skills needed by clients of federal employment training programs such as Perkins Vocational Education (VOC ED), administered by the Department of Education; Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS), administered by the Department of Health and Human Services; and the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), administered by the Department of Labor. Consequently, the AEA and employment training legislation require

[5]Each state receives $250,000 before the formula is applied.

[6]More than 44 million people were in this category, according to the 1990 Census.

[7]The GED is equivalent to a high school diploma and is awarded upon successful completion of a battery of nationally normed and scored tests.

coordination among these programs to avoid duplication and enhance service delivery.

The National Literacy Act of 1991[8] amended the AEA and authorized several new programs. Major provisions included the creation of the National Institute for Literacy, the establishment of state and regional literacy resource centers, and a requirement for the Department of Education to develop model indicators of program quality to guide states in developing their own indicators for improved program evaluation.

The 104th Congress is considering legislation that would consolidate adult education and other programs and provide one or more block grants to states. The Senate bill[9] would repeal most existing federal employment training programs, including the State Grant Program, and replace them with a single block grant. The House bill[10] would also repeal most employment training programs but replace them with four block grants, including a separate grant for adult education and literacy programs.

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

At the request of the Chairman and Ranking Minority Member of the former House Committee on Education and Labor and the Chairman and Ranking Minority Member of the former Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education, we reviewed several issues related to the AEA. Specifically, we examined

- the goals of the AEA and its largest program (the State Grant Program), the population served by the program, program services, and its coordination with federal employment training programs and
- the extent to which the State Grant Program ensures accountability for program quality and results, including how states have implemented quality indicators.

We focused our review primarily on the State Grant Program because it is the largest of the AEA's funded programs. In fiscal year 1995, 83 percent of AEA funds were allocated to this program.

[8]Public Law 102-73.

[9]The Job Training Consolidation Act of 1995 (S. 143, 104th Cong.) was introduced on January 4, 1995.

[10]The Consolidated and Reformed Education, Employment, and Rehabilitation Systems Act or CAREERS Act (H.R. 1617, 104th Cong.) was introduced on May 11, 1995.

To obtain nationwide information on the State Grant Program, we interviewed federal officials from the Department of Education. We also reviewed Department of Education data and recent national studies, including the National Evaluation of Adult Education Programs and the National Adult Literacy Survey.

We selected three states for closer review: California, Connecticut, and Iowa. We selected these states because they provided some geographic dispersion and represented a range of (1) state and local financial commitments (as demonstrated by the percentage of matching funds each state contributes), (2) program size (as demonstrated by dollars and enrollment), and (3) ESL enrollment levels. Within each state, we visited at least two communities that we selected with the help of state adult education officials. We selected communities that represented different types of locales (urban, suburban, rural) and were involved in a variety of local coordination activities.

To identify the goals of the AEA, including the State Grant Program, we reviewed federal legislation. To determine the populations served and services provided by the program, we reviewed Department of Education data and national studies. We also interviewed local adult education providers.

To provide information on the coordination of AEA programs with employment training programs, we interviewed federal officials at the Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services, and held discussions with national experts, including representatives of the National Institute for Literacy. We also reviewed studies on coordination. In the states we visited, we met with state officials from adult education and JOBS, JTPA, and VOC ED programs. In Iowa and parts of California, where the community college system is the major adult education provider, we also met with state community college representatives. At local levels in the three states, we met with adult education providers as well as representatives of local employment training programs.

To provide information on program accountability and quality, we interviewed Department of Education officials and held discussions with national adult education experts. We also reviewed the Department's model indicators of program quality and studies on program accountability and quality issues. In addition, we interviewed state and local officials in California, Connecticut, and Iowa and reviewed program documents, including the quality indicators developed by these states.

We conducted our work between November 1994 and August 1995 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Largest AEA Program Strives to Meet Many Goals and Needs

The AEA is a broad and flexible act and its largest program, the State Grant Program, reflects this. The State Grant Program, the federal government's primary adult education program, has many goals and enables people with a wide range of needs to receive instruction from a variety of service providers. Many clients of employment training programs are among those needing the basic skills taught by adult education. Although the program has some restrictions, it allows states considerable flexibility in the types of instruction they fund with their federal grants as long as they fund programs in accordance with federally approved state plans. In keeping with their state plans, which call for coordinating adult education with employment training programs, a variety of coordination activities were taking place in the states and communities we visited.

Goals Are Broad

Recognizing the wide range of adult literacy needs in this country, the Congress passed the AEA with broadly stated goals. Although adult education programs are commonly viewed as the means to obtain a high school diploma or its equivalent, the AEA established goals that are far broader and include citizenship and employment as well as the overall improvement of the adult education system. Specifically, the purpose of the AEA is to

- improve educational opportunities for adults who lack literacy skills necessary for effective citizenship and productive employment;
- expand and improve the current adult education delivery system; and
- encourage the establishment of adult education programs for adults to (1) acquire basic skills needed for literate functioning, (2) acquire basic education needed to benefit from job training and obtain and keep productive employment, and (3) continue their education to at least the secondary school level.

Adult Education Students Are Diverse

Adult education students have diverse needs, circumstances, and personal characteristics. A student might be a high school dropout, a client in a job training program, an immigrant or refugee, a displaced worker or homemaker, an adult in the workplace, a welfare recipient, or a retiree. Students who enroll in adult education classes vary in age, race and ethnicity, and employment status.

In one program we visited in a rural California town, a 23-year-old refugee was enrolled in an Adult Secondary Education (ASE) class. He was a machine operator with an eleventh grade education who planned to earn

his GED and become a bilingual teacher. A 45-year-old unemployed mother of four with a third grade education was enrolled in an English as a Second Language (ESL) class. Having done seasonal work in the past, her goal was to obtain a GED and find work in the nursing field.

In an urban Connecticut program, a 19-year-old mother on welfare wanted to complete high school and become a cosmetologist. Although she had a tenth grade education, she needed the basic skills taught in an Adult Basic Education (ABE) class. In the same program, a 62-year-old immigrant who had been an accountant in Russia was attending ESL classes. Her goal was to become a U.S. citizen. In a suburban program in Connecticut, a 28-year-old part-time stock clerk was enrolled in an ASE class. He had a ninth grade education and lived with his parents. He hoped to earn his GED, attend college, and become a police officer.

In a rural town in Iowa, a 48-year-old father of four from Laos spoke no English and was enrolled in a beginning ESL class. He worked part-time as an upholstery worker but hoped to learn English well enough to get a full-time job. In a city in Iowa, a married, 35-year-old mother of three was enrolled in an ABE class. A former welfare recipient, she had a job as a child care aide that was contingent upon her earning a GED. Her goal was to earn the GED and keep her job.

National statistics also suggest that adult education students are fairly diverse. Nationwide, 38 percent of students enrolled in adult education classes in 1993 were between the ages of 16 and 24, 46 percent were between the ages of 25 and 44, and the remaining students were 45 years old or older, according to the Department of Education. Also, 36 percent of the students were white, 31 percent Hispanic, 18 percent black, 14 percent Asian or Pacific Islander, and 1 percent American Indian or Alaskan Native.

The National Evaluation of Adult Education Programs[11] conducted a survey of students who entered the adult education system between April 1991 and April 1992. It found that 42 percent of these students were employed, and 58 percent were either unemployed or not in the workforce when they enrolled. During the year before enrollment, 43 percent of ABE students, 31 percent of ASE students, and 14 percent of ESL students received public assistance or welfare payments.

[11]National Evaluation of Adult Education Programs, Second Interim Report: Profiles of Client Characteristics, Development Associates, Inc. (Arlington, Va.: 1993).

Many Employment Training Clients Need Adult Education Services

Many clients of federal employment training programs rely on the State Grant Program for the basic skills they lack. According to the Department of Labor, unless an attempt is made to upgrade the literacy skills of clients in federal employment training programs, clients' success may be limited and access to the job market may be denied. Nationwide, almost 30 percent of JTPA clients are school dropouts,[12] and as many as half may lack basic skills.[13] One-fourth of JOBS clients in fiscal year 1992 were enrolled in a high school completion program.[14]

Adult education enrollment has risen almost every year since 1966, and the Congress is considering welfare reform proposals that may place even greater demands on adult education providers. These proposals may also make the coordination among adult education, welfare, and employment training programs even more critical. Some states are already implementing their own welfare reform efforts that require certain welfare clients to obtain adult education or employment training services to receive assistance. For example, California's JOBS program requires that welfare recipients have opportunities to remedy basic skill deficiencies and earn a high school diploma or GED credential. The state is currently required to provide adult education to its JOBS clients with low assessment scores and to continue to provide education until clients attain a specified level of proficiency.

Connecticut has piloted a welfare reform program that targets certain welfare recipients. Individuals in the pilot can receive needed remedial services, such as adult education or vocational training, for 2 years before being required to find jobs. According to a state official, the pilot was limited to two communities because of concerns about the state's ability to provide remedial services to all needy individuals, particularly adult education services. If a client has only 2 years to seek remedial services and faces a waiting list for adult education services, both the client and the entire program are at risk, explained the official.

Similarly, Iowa's JOBS program has a goal of moving people off welfare within 2 years by providing remedial education and employment training. This welfare reform effort has increased the percentage of welfare

[12]Workplace Literacy and the Nation's Unemployed Workers, U.S. Department of Labor (Washington, D.C.: 1993).

[13]I. Kirch, A. Jungeblut, and A. Campbell, Beyond the School Doors: The Literacy Needs of Job Seekers Served by the U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Department of Labor (Washington, D.C.: 1992).

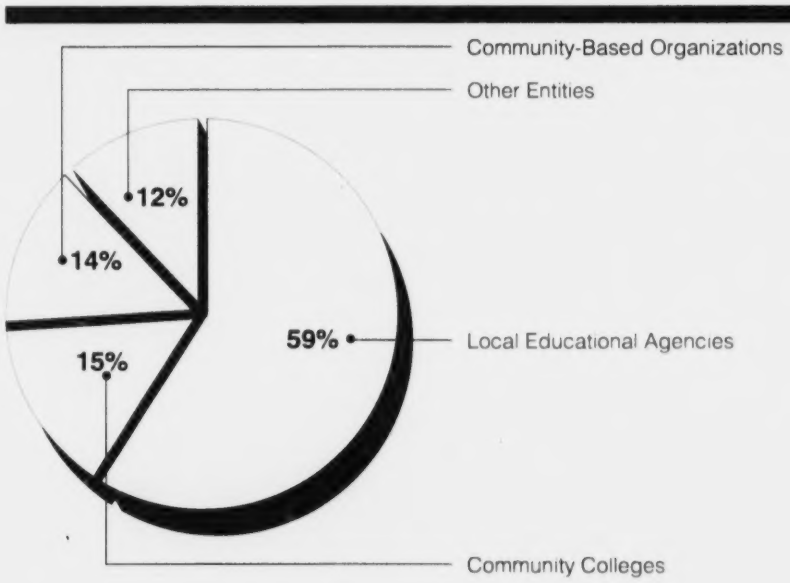
[14]Overview of Entitlement Programs: 1994 Green Book, Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives (Washington, D.C.: 1994).

recipients required to participate in the JOBS program from 24 to 88 percent. This increase is achieved, in part, by exempting fewer welfare recipients from participating in the JOBS program. For example, only parents with children under 6 months of age are exempt; previously, parents with children under the age of 3 were exempt.

Wide Range of Adult Education Providers Use a Variety of Approaches

Under the State Grant Program, states may fund local educational agencies[15] and a variety of public or private nonprofit agencies,[16] organizations, and institutions to provide adult education classes. Most programs are administered by local educational agencies. Figure 2.1 shows the extent to which different organizations provide adult education.

Figure 2.1: Adult Education Providers, Fiscal Year 1992



Note: Other entities include public/private nonprofit organizations and correctional institutions.

Source: U.S. Department of Education.

[15]In most cases, the local education agency is a school district.

[16]For-profit agencies may be included under certain circumstances.

Many adult education providers use flexible and, in some cases, less traditional approaches to education that may better suit the responsibilities and needs of adult students. For example, to make classes more accessible to adults, providers may offer both day and night classes. Unemployed adults may prefer daytime classes; adults who work or have child care responsibilities may only be able to attend night classes. We also found that some programs offer on-site child care, which can make it easier for parents to attend adult education classes.

The flexible "open-entry/open-exit" feature of most adult education providers may also better suit their students' lives than the traditional September-to-June school year. The National Evaluation of Adult Education Programs found that 66 percent of adult education programs allowed students to enroll and begin instruction at any time.[17]

Service providers use a variety of instructional methods to meet students' needs. For example, the principal of an adult school in a rural California town explained that her program provides "individualized instruction," which means that teachers assess the individual goals and abilities of the students and take these into consideration in planning classroom instruction. Several methods or a combination of methods may then be employed: large group lectures or presentations; small-group instruction, including role play or practice in conversation or writing skills; or one-on-one tutoring if the ratio of aides to students permits it.

Some programs encourage adults who need both basic skills and employment training to enroll in both concurrently; others recommend basic skills training first so that students have the necessary foundation for employment training. Concurrent enrollment, some state and local officials argue, may enhance learning and move adults into the workforce faster.

Within Confines of AEA, States Have Flexibility in Funding Instruction

The AEA limits states' flexibility in determining how to spend their State Grant Program funds by specifying how a significant portion of the funds are to be spent. However, with the remaining unrestricted funds, the combinations and types of instruction states fund vary greatly.

The AEA specifies that states must spend at least 15 percent of their grants on teacher training and program innovation and at least 10 percent on

[17]M.B. Young, M. Morgan, N. Fitzgerald, and H. Fleischman, National Evaluation of Adult Education Programs: Draft Final Report, Development Associates, Inc. (Arlington, Va.: 1994).

programs serving incarcerated or institutionalized adults. No more than 20 percent can be spent on programs for certificates of high school equivalency, and no more than 5 percent can be spent on state administration.

States can decide on the types and combinations of instruction they wish to fund as long as they meet the AEA's set-asides and fund programs in accordance with their state plans. Most providers offer the three most common types of instruction—ABE, ASE, and ESL. Enrollment in each varies greatly by state and community. Table 2.1 shows how enrollment levels vary by instructional area nationally as well as in the three states we visited.

Table 2.1: State Grant Program Enrollment, July 1, 1992, to June 30, 1993

State	ABE (percent)	ASE (percent)	ESL (percent)
U.S. (all states)	34	26	40
California	10	6	84
Connecticut	21	42	37
Iowa	62	27	11

Source: U.S. Department of Education

States and Communities Coordinate With Employment Training Programs in a Variety of Ways

In keeping with state plans, which call for coordinating adult education with employment training programs, a variety of coordination activities were taking place in the states and communities we visited. These activities, however, were not easy to establish. They took time to develop and often depended on the perseverance of agency staff and local service providers. State and local coordination efforts included pooling funds, establishing one-stop centers, and developing uniform assessment systems.

Pooling Funds

Connecticut has pooled funds from many[19] sources for Coordinated Education and Training Opportunities grants. When a service provider receives a grant, it may contain funds from one or more funding sources. These coordinated grants are implemented through regional workforce development boards responsible for a range of tasks, including identifying local needs, evaluating grant proposals, and overseeing operations. These

[19]These sources are the State Grant Program; JTPA's title IIA and IIC State Education programs; Perkins Single Parents, Displaced Homemakers, and Single Pregnant Women programs; and a state match of federal JOBS funds.

grants have the advantage of allowing service providers to deal with a single planning process and a single request for proposal. However, according to officials of one regional workforce development board, although these grants may make things "seamless" for the client, the service provider still must meet all the federal reporting requirements of their many funding sources.

In Iowa, the community colleges coordinate funds from the State Grant, JTPA, and VOC ED programs. Each of the state's 15 community colleges administers the State Grant Program and offers adult education classes. In addition, half of the colleges administer JTPA programs. Services from these many programs are often administered by staff who are both located at the college and operate within the same department. This arrangement facilitates coordinated program planning, service delivery, and referral of clients to multiple programs. At one college, administrators from the adult education, JTPA, and VOC ED programs told us that their close proximity enabled them to review a client's total needs and provide the maximum allowable services. For example, a welfare recipient might receive adult education instruction from the State Grant Program, a clothing allowance from the JTPA program, and a transportation subsidy from the JOBS program.

Some of the coordination between California's JOBS program and State Grant Program takes the form of financial support from many agencies. Adult education programs that serve the state's JOBS clients receive adult education and JOBS funds and may also draw funds from an 8-percent set-aside of JTPA funds for education programs that are matched by the state. In some counties, the state's JOBS program pays for adult education programs to meet JOBS' data collection and reporting requirements, which include administering the same competency-based assessment to all state JOBS clients. Adult education does not cover these costs. One adult education principal told us that, if not for the JOBS program's covering these costs, program staff would not be able to do as much record keeping or assessment as they do.

Establishing One-Stop Centers

All three states we visited had begun efforts to establish one-stop centers. These centers are intended to help clients who need services from many programs find all of the services they need in one location or go to a single location to access information about the services they need. Officials in one community spoke of the administrative burden imposed by the multiple federal program requirements of establishing a one-stop center.

All three states recently received grants from the Department of Labor to pilot one-stop centers, which are being established around the country even in places that have not received Department of Labor grants. The one-stop center we visited in California was established without a grant from Labor. The Department of Labor's one-stop grants support voluntary state coordination. All three states considered adult education important and, thus, included adult education officials in planning their efforts.

With the help of the Department of Labor's one-stop grant, Iowa recently opened its first one-stop center to provide services to clients of employment training programs. Adult education staff were on site to perform client intake and assessment. Adult education instruction has been offered on site since February 1995.

Connecticut was using its Department of Labor grant to develop one-stop centers, where client intake and evaluation would take place and where clients could be referred to multiple agencies for services they need. Local officials in one community said their goal was to develop three centers and install computers in libraries, bus terminals, and shopping malls so the public could access information on local services, such as adult education classes.

One community we visited in California set up a one-stop center without a Department of Labor grant. To prevent unnecessary duplication of services and facilitate successful completion of training and the transition to employment, this center established linkages to more than 100 agencies and businesses. Features of the center included a central information line, career library, computerized career assessment, and on-site employment interviews.

Developing Uniform Assessment Systems

A single assessment system used across state agencies can facilitate coordination and make access to services easier for clients. Using one system allows clients to move easily among education and training programs, provides a common assessment vocabulary so that all agencies can determine initial client proficiency levels as well as ongoing progress, and minimizes duplicative or unnecessary testing of clients. However, not all adult education and employment training officials agree that a single assessment system can appropriately measure adults' skills.

To varying degrees, Connecticut and California were using common assessments. Connecticut required that adult education, JTPA, and JOBS

programs all use the same assessment system. California's JOBS program uses the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) for assessing its clients, but the state's adult education program uses CASAS only on a sample of programs. Iowa was piloting CASAS but only for use by adult education providers.

Measuring Program Results Has Proven Difficult

Measuring results in the State Grant Program has proven difficult because program objectives have not been clearly defined and questions exist about the validity and appropriateness of student assessments and the usefulness of nationally reported data on results. Although the Department of Education has focused on developing model program indicators that states could use to evaluate local programs, experts and program officials disagree about whether the indicators alone will enhance accountability. Efforts to enhance the evaluation capabilities of state agency staff and improve data collection continue, but it is too early to assess their impact.

Difficulties in Establishing Program Objectives

Evaluating program results depends on clear program objectives as well as criteria for measuring the achievement of those objectives. The broad objectives of the State Grant Program give the states the flexibility to set their own priorities but, some argue, they do not provide states with sufficient direction for measuring results. Moreover, reaching a consensus on measurable objectives for adult education is difficult.

Because the State Grant Program's objectives are so broadly defined, state officials have developed a variety of views on measuring program results. For example, some officials told us that they might measure program success by whether adults gained the skill to read to their children and, thus, contribute to their children's literacy. Others might focus on whether adults can read street signs or the newspaper. And, in one state we visited, an official contended that completing high school and finding productive work should be the objectives of the states' adult education programs because completing a basic skills program and becoming a citizen are no longer sufficient to succeed in society.

Several experts and program officials told us that the State Grant Program lacks a coherent vision of the skills and knowledge adults need to be considered literate. Similarly, some state officials said that they would like the federal government to further specify the types of results expected from state adult education programs.

Reaching consensus on measurable objectives, however, may be difficult since research findings are often inconclusive about the long-term benefits to adults of achieving various program results. For example, many adult education programs focus on preparing adults to take the GED examination as a means of high school completion. Yet research findings are mixed about whether GED attainment reflects increased literacy skills and

whether GED recipients are economically better off than high school dropouts.[19]

Concerns Raised About Adult Student Assessments

Ensuring accountability has also been hampered by limitations in the assessment instruments used to measure student outcomes in adult education programs. The research literature raises questions about the validity of standardized tests used to measure adult literacy, and local program staff have questioned the appropriateness of using these assessments to measure program results.

The AEA requires states to gather and analyze standardized test data as one way of evaluating local programs.[20] These assessments tend to focus on either academic skills or functional literacy. Academic tests, such as the Tests of Adult Basic Education (known as "TABE"), focus on measuring such basic skills as reading comprehension, vocabulary, language expression, and mathematical proficiency. Functional literacy or competency-based tests, such as the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS), focus on the ability to perform literacy-related tasks in situations faced by adults in everyday life at home, at work, or in the community.

Experts have questioned the validity of both the academic and functional literacy tests used in adult education programs. For example, two recent reviews point to a lack of normative data for the age ranges of participants in most adult education programs.[21] Functional literacy tests may lack validity because they are not derived from theoretical models of ability but from everyday literacy tasks. According to a recent review, without further analyses, the instructional implications of test performance are unclear.[22]

[19]See, for example, J. Baldwin, NALS, SALS, and GED: Related Studies and Their Implications, presentation at the Annual Conference, State Directors of Adult Education (Louisville, Ky.: July 1994); H. Beder, What Has Happened to Iowa's GED Graduates? Iowa State Department of Education (Des Moines, Ia.: 1992); S. Cameron and J. Heckman, The Nonequivalence of High School Equivalents, National Bureau of Economic Research (Cambridge, Mass.: 1991); D. Kaplan and R. Venezky, What Can Employers Assume About the Literacy Skills of GED Graduates? National Center on Adult Literacy (Philadelphia: 1993).

[20]The act does not specify which tests must be used or how states must gather test data from local programs.

[21]D. Wagner and R. Venezky, "Adult Literacy: The Next Generation," NCAL Connections, National Center on Adult Literacy (Philadelphia: 1995); W. Merz and J. Kruckenberg, Quality Standards and Performance Measures: Preliminary Feasibility Study on the Uses of Basic Skills Assessment Tests, Adult Education Institute for Research and Planning (Sacramento, Cal.: Dec. 1991).

[22]R. Venezky, Matching Literacy Testing With Social Policy: What Are the Alternatives? National Center on Adult Literacy (Philadelphia: 1992).

Thus, these assessments may not provide useful information about the skills and needs of adult students.

A more serious problem affecting the validity of assessments is the lack of research examining the long-term retention of learning gains in adult education programs. According to one researcher, a comprehensive search did not uncover a single published study on the effectiveness of adult education programs in helping adults retain the skills they may have acquired during instruction.[23] This being the case, improved test scores may not necessarily mean that adults will be better equipped for high-skilled jobs, function better as parents, or participate more fully as citizens.

However, officials in the three states we visited felt that competency-based assessment systems could be useful in measuring progress in local adult education programs and, thus, strongly advocated these systems. California had developed CASAS and required its use in a sample of one-third of its adult education programs. Connecticut had designed its own competency-based testing system (adapted from CASAS) and required its use in all adult education programs. Iowa had recently decided to move toward a competency-based system and was piloting CASAS in 9 of its 15 community college districts.

Local adult education and employment training staff had mixed views about their states' competency-based assessments. Some local program staff saw the CASAS assessment system as a valuable and flexible tool. However, some English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers were dissatisfied with the CASAS test as a measure of how well adult education students learned to communicate in English. And some employment training staff said that the CASAS test did not give them sufficiently specific information about their clients or focused too much on life skills.

Finally, several local staff questioned the appropriateness of CASAS as the sole assessment tool and, therefore, used CASAS in conjunction with other tests. Administrators and experts also told us that they thought no single test could measure all relevant aspects of student performance.

[23]D. Wagner, Use It or Lose It? The Problem of Adult Literacy Skill Retention, National Center on Adult Literacy (Philadelphia: 1994).

Adult Student Data Missing or Inaccurate

The poor quality of the data on adult education students collected at state and local levels also hampers accountability. Federal and state officials as well as recent studies have cited problems with these data. The studies have attributed difficulties in obtaining accurate data to the sporadic attendance patterns of adult students and the limited time and expertise of local adult education program staff.

State officials are required to submit to the Department of Education annual statistical performance reports that include information on students served by local programs. State-submitted reports include (1) the number of students served and their demographic characteristics, (2) the skill levels of students when they start adult education programs, (3) student progress over the program year, (4) eight types of student achievements,[24] and (5) the number of students who do not complete their objectives and their reasons for separation. The reports also include information on program staff and the types of instructional settings in which students are served.

Department of Education officials acknowledged serious problems with the quality of the statistical reports, some of which are based on double counting or undercounting of students in adult education programs. Another Department official charged that many of the data are questionable and that very few local programs have record systems that allow them to report the data the Department requires.

Comments of officials in one state confirmed these data problems. They said that they did not have all the information the Department requires for their statistical reports because too many resources are required to collect the data. As a result, they simply do not report some of the data elements and provide estimates of the other information. They noted that the data they submit need not be certified and that the Department has never audited their statistical reports. Furthermore, they asserted that these data have nothing to do with receiving federal funds. The only thing that really counts, they said, is the number of adults in the state who do not have diplomas because that is what drives the funding formula.

Also, some local staff failed to see the utility in collecting the data that states require for reporting to the federal government. Some said they

[24]The categories in the federal reporting forms are (1) obtained an adult high school diploma, (2) passed the GED test, (3) entered other education or training program, (4) received U.S. citizenship, (5) registered to vote or voted for the first time, (6) gained employment, (7) secured employment retention or obtained job advancement, and (8) removed from public assistance.

thought that the information they are required to report does not accurately reflect the accomplishments of their adult education students.

Difficulties in obtaining accurate data can also be attributed to attendance patterns of adult students and the limited capacity and expertise of local program staff. The open-entry/open-exit feature of many programs adds to the difficulty of tracking adult students. Because students may not stay in the program long or may attend on a sporadic basis, program staff do not always have sufficient information to report on student progress or results. Because local programs have difficulty following up on students, program officials may rely on information reported by teachers or the students themselves.

In addition, many local programs lack sufficient staff to handle data collection and reporting responsibilities, according to a survey of adult education programs in nine states.[25] Programs are typically staffed by part-time personnel, and these responsibilities become an extra burden. Also, local program staff may lack expertise in collecting assessment data that can help track program effectiveness. For example, when the National Evaluation of Adult Education Programs asked local adult education program staff to provide certain assessment data, it found that about one-third of the information was invalid because (1) the wrong test forms were used, (2) data were inaccurately recorded, or (3) tests were administered at the wrong times.[26] Similarly, as Connecticut began to implement a new assessment system statewide, administrators discovered that they needed to clarify program guidance because some local programs were mistakenly measuring literacy gains using a test designed solely for student placement.

Efforts to Improve Program Quality and Accountability

Federal efforts to improve quality and accountability have focused on (1) developing model indicators; (2) providing technical assistance to states and local programs on data collection, assessment, and developing performance standards and measures; and (3) requiring states to set aside funds for training and demonstration projects.

[25]L. Condelli, Implementing the Enhanced Evaluation Model: Lessons Learned from the Field Test, Pelavin Associates, Inc. (Washington, D.C.: 1994).

[26]M.B. Young, N. Fitzgerald, and M. Morgan, National Evaluation of Adult Education Programs: Executive Summary, Development Associates, Inc. (Arlington, Va.: 1994). One component of the evaluation was a longitudinal study of a nationally representative sample of local programs that provided information on the characteristics of a national sample of 22,000 adults who enrolled in local programs between April 1991 and April 1992.

Federal and State Program Quality Indicators

Provisions of the National Literacy Act focus on improving quality in adult education programs by requiring the Secretary of Education to develop indicators of program quality. The indicators were to be used as models for judging state and local programs receiving federal funding. States were also required to develop and implement their own indicators, which might or might not correspond to the federal model, and use them to evaluate state and local programs.

The Department of Education developed model indicators by (1) reviewing adult education indicators already being developed by various states and indicators used by other federal programs, (2) meeting with experts and adult educators, (3) commissioning background papers by experts in the field, and (4) conducting workshops for state directors who would be responsible for developing and implementing the state indicators. The resulting eight model indicators of program quality are listed in table 3.1. The indicators cover student outcomes, that is, learner progress toward attainment of basic skills and competencies and learner advancement in the program. They also focus on recruiting and retaining adult education students and other indicators of program quality—planning, curriculum and instruction, staff development, and provision of support services.

Table 3.1: Model Indicators of Program Quality for Adult Education Programs

Topic	Indicator
Educational gains	1. Learners demonstrate progress toward attainment of basic skills and competencies that support their educational needs.
	2. Learners advance in the instructional program or complete program educational requirements that allow them to continue their education or training.
Program planning	3. Program has a planning process that is ongoing and participatory, guided by evaluation, and based on a written plan that considers community demographics, needs, resources, and economic and technological trends, and is implemented to the fullest extent.
Curriculum and instruction	4. Program has curriculum and instruction geared to individual student learning styles and levels of student needs.
Staff development	5. Program has an ongoing staff development process that considers the specific needs of its staff, offers training in the skills necessary to provide quality instruction, and includes opportunities for practice and systematic follow-up.
Support services	6. Program identifies students' needs for support services available to students directly or through referral to other educational and service agencies with which the program coordinates.
Recruitment	7. Program successfully recruits the population in the community identified in the AEA as needing literacy services.
Retention	8. Students remain in the program long enough to meet their educational needs.

Source: Model Indicators of Program Quality for Adult Education Programs, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education (Washington, D.C.: July 1992)

The Department did not attempt to set performance standards for adult education programs but limited its work to developing indicators and providing some sample measures for each indicator. The Department defined an indicator as a variable that reflects effective and efficient program performance. It is to be distinguished from a specific measure used to determine the quantitative level of performance for the indicator. For example, to measure learner progress, states could use standardized

test score gains, teacher reports of gains in communication competencies, or alternative assessment methods (such as portfolio assessments, student reports of attainment, or improvements in specific employability or life skills). An indicator is also to be distinguished from a performance standard, which defines acceptable performance in terms of a specific numeric criterion.

The National Literacy Act also required states to adopt indicators by July 1993 and use them to evaluate local programs. States were required to adopt, at a minimum, indicators for recruitment, retention, and student learning outcomes. However, decisions about whether to adopt the Department's model indicators, what measures to use, and whether to develop performance standards were left to the states. A review of amendments to state adult education plans submitted in July 1993 showed that for the most part states had adopted indicators similar to the Department's model, especially in the areas of student outcomes, recruitment, and retention.[27] However, states were less consistent in how they measured indicators. The review found that states were using different standardized tests to measure learner progress and had defined learner advancement in different ways. A 1995 survey of state adult education directors showed that 16 states had implemented standards and 8 states had developed but not yet implemented standards.[28]

Each of the three states we visited had developed standards for student outcomes, but not all of these standards were readily quantifiable. California had developed standards for seven levels of language proficiency for ESL students (the majority of adult education students in the state) but had not yet quantified performance on specific assessment measures. Standards for other kinds of adult education students in California had not yet been completed. Connecticut had set standards for educational gains expected over a specific time period and measured their achievement using test scores and the number of course credits or competencies attained. Iowa had set standards for grade level increases on standardized tests and for the performance of GED graduates on the GED exam. Since Iowa had not yet determined a specific strategy for competency-based education, the state had not yet established standards for competency-based tests.

[27]B.G. Elliott and B.J. Hayward, Adult Education Performance Data: Improving Federal Management and Program Performance, Research Triangle Institute (Research Triangle Park, N.C.: 1994).

[28]Status of Development of Measures and Standards for the Quality Indicators for the Adult Education Program, U.S. Department of Education (Washington, D.C.: May 1995).

Experts as well as federal and state officials with whom we spoke disagreed about whether developing indicators would improve accountability and program quality. Some were concerned that the indicators do not move the field forward because they do not specify the types of results the federal government expects from state and local programs. One federal official doubted whether the indicators alone would help state and local programs collect higher quality data. However, other experts told us that they thought the indicators were a good first step. Still others said that the federal government should not be setting standards for states because states' literacy problems and clientele differ.

Too Soon to Assess Efforts to Enhance Accountability and Program Quality

It is too soon to tell whether state-developed indicators, measures, and performance standards will result in the collection of more useful data or help states evaluate local programs since the 1993-94 program year was the first year in which indicators were to be used for evaluation. One state we visited planned to use information collected during the 1993-94 program year as baseline data and begin to hold local programs accountable for performance on the state's indicators in subsequent years.

Other federal efforts have been initiated to help states develop better accountability systems. Two of these efforts are designed to help build the capacity and expertise of state adult education staff to evaluate local programs. In 1993, the Department hired a contractor for a 3-year technical assistance effort designed to assist state education agencies with assessment, evaluation, and the development of performance standards and measures. And, in 1993, the National Institute for Literacy awarded grants to five states to develop performance measurement systems for literacy, with a specific focus on integrating systems used by different agencies that provide literacy services.

Department officials also told us that they were acting to improve the quality of data collected on adult education programs. In concert with state adult education directors, the Department has been examining whether to modify the existing federal reporting requirements. They have held several meetings but have not yet issued any recommendations. In addition, the Department has developed and tested an automated management information system that would allow programs to collect data on individual students and a computer program that would help states more easily convert data they collected to the statistical reports required by the Department. A field test of the management information system in selected local programs in five states revealed that local staff

appreciated the system's report-writing capabilities but remained highly resistant to performing data collection and entry.

In addition to these efforts, the requirement that states set aside a portion of their federal funds for demonstration projects and training may also help states move toward better accountability systems.[29] Although the Department has not completed an ongoing national evaluation of the use of these funds, state officials asserted that the set-aside was critical to their efforts to improve program quality. All three states had used these federal funds, in part, to develop competency-based instruction and assessment systems; they had also used the funds to address state-specific issues. California had developed a training institute for ESL teachers, Connecticut had used some of the funds to help implement a new statewide management information system, and Iowa had held a state literacy conference to examine how to better measure adult student progress through qualitative assessments.

[29]The 1988 AEA amendments required that at least 10 percent of the state grant be used for special demonstration projects and for training adult education teachers and other staff. The National Literacy Act raised the requirement to 15 percent and specified that at least two-thirds of this set-aside (10 percent of the total grant) be used for training.

Conclusions and Agency Comments

Conclusions

The broad goals and flexibility of the AEA and its State Grant Program have resulted in a federal program that is serving many different populations, yet has difficulty determining its target populations, objectives, or a means to measure program results. Although the broad goals and corresponding flexibility give state and local officials the latitude to design programs and quality indicators tailored to their particular needs and priorities, some state officials and experts have voiced concerns that the federal government has not provided sufficient vision and guidance. This poses a challenge for developing accountability measures.

The program has had difficulty ensuring accountability for results—that is, being able to clearly or accurately say what program funds have accomplished. Although the Department of Education relies on federal reporting requirements and program quality indicators to provide this information, the data the Department receives are of questionable value. Because state and local client data are missing or inaccurate, attempts to make the program accountable may be compromised. Until further guidance is developed on measurable objectives and ensuring the quality of client data, state-developed indicators and standards are unlikely to improve accountability.

Agency Comments

In its written comments on a draft of the report, the Department of Education recognized that we identified the three areas that are critically important to improving accountability in adult education: clear purpose and expectations, good assessment instruments, and high-quality data.

The Department also stated its commitment to improving program accountability through several current initiatives. These initiatives include developing an individualized student record keeping system; moving toward an outcomes-based national data collection system; conducting evaluations of delivery systems, effective practice, assessment, and performance measurement; providing technical assistance in designing and using performance measures and standards; and developing training programs for adult education staff in collecting, analyzing, and reporting student and program data. (The Department's letter appears in app. II.)

State Grant Program Budget and Enrollment Data

Table I.1: AEA Appropriations, Fiscal Year 1995

Dollars in millions

Programs	Appropriations
Funded	
State Grant Program	$252.3
National Demonstration Workplace Literacy Partnership Program	18.7
Literacy Training for Homeless Adults Program	9.5
State Literacy Resource Centers Program	7.8
Functional Literacy for State and Local Prisoners Program and Life Skills for State and Local Prisoners Program	5.1
Adult Education, National Programs: Evaluation/Technical Assistance	3.9
Adult Education, National Programs: National Institute for Literacy	4.9
Total	**$302.2**
Unfunded	
Adult Literacy Volunteer Training	
Adult Migrant Farmworker/Immigrant Education	
Education Programs for Commercial Drivers	
English Literacy Grants	
National Workforce Literacy Strategies Program	
State-Administered Workplace Literacy Programs	

Source: U.S. Department of Education

Table I.2: State Grant Program Enrollment and Funding History, Fiscal Years 1966-1995

		Expenditures		
Year	Enrollment[a]	Federal[b]	State and local	Federal, state, and local
1966	377,600	$19,879,912	$9,919,000	$29,798,912
1967	388,900	26,280,000	8,334,000	34,614,000
1968	455,700	30,590,000	9,574,000	40,164,000
1969	484,600	36,000,000	11,686,000	47,686,000
1970	535,600	40,000,000	12,461,000	52,461,000
1971	620,900	44,866,102	15,322,000	60,188,102
1972	820,500	51,134,000	17,371,000	68,505,000
1973	822,500	74,834,000	20,127,000	94,961,000
1974	965,100	53,286,000	27,296,000	80,582,000
1975	1,221,200	67,500,000	43,230,000	110,730,000
1976	1,651,100	67,500,000	41,125,000	108,625,000
1977	1,686,300	71,500,000	41,992,000	113,492,000
1978	1,811,100	80,500,000	51,477,000	131,977,000
1979	1,806,300	90,750,000	63,064,000	153,814,000

(continued)

		Expenditures		
Year	Enrollment[a]	Federal[b]	State and local	Federal, state, and local
1980	2,058,000	100,000,000	74,288,475	174,288,475
1981	2,261,300	100,000,000	104,212,622	204,212,622
1982	2,176,900	100,000,000	128,654,773	228,654,773
1983	2,576,300	86,400,000	172,691,213	259,091,213
1984	2,596,500	100,000,000	196,691,149	296,691,149
1985	2,879,100	101,963,000	240,410,289	342,373,289
1986	2,797,500	97,579,000	319,942,176	417,521,176
1987	2,945,600	105,981,000	400,383,790	506,364,790
1988	3,039,400	115,367,000	491,329,659	606,696,659
1989	3,257,000	136,344,000	566,656,213	703,000,213
1990	3,567,200	157,811,000	622,069,755	779,880,755
1991	3,722,600	201,032,000	809,540,972	1,010,572,972
1992	3,838,000	235,750,000	832,208,120[d]	1,067,958,120
1993	3,880,400	254,624,000	855,509,950[d]	1,110,133,950
1994	3,978,000[c]	254,624,000	872,620,150[d]	1,127,244,150
1995	4,078,000[c]	252,345,000	890,072,550[d]	1,142,417,550

[a]Enrollment is the number of participants who complete 12 or more program hours, with each participant reported only once, regardless of the number of classes or programs attended during the program year reported.

[b]This column reflects federal appropriations data because federal expenditure data were not readily available. According to Department of Education officials, appropriations and expenditure data for the program tend to be virtually the same.

[c]Projected.

[d]Estimated.

Source: U.S. Department of Education.

Table I.3: State Grant Program Enrollment by Instructional Area, Fiscal Years 1970-1995

Enrollment in thousands

Fiscal year	Enrollment[a] Adult Basic Education	Adult Secondary Education	English as a Second Language	Total
1970	536	[b]	[b]	536
1971	621	[b]	[b]	621
1972	599	222	[c]	821
1973	633	189	[c]	822
1974	772	193	[c]	965
1975	[c]	[c]	[c]	1,221
1976	1,073	578	[c]	1,651
1977	822	658	206[d]	1,686
1978	831	583	397[d]	1,811
1979	830	587	389[d]	1,806
1980	938	543	577[d]	2,058
1981	1,607	654	[c]	2,261
1982	1,607	570	[c]	2,177
1983	1,569	600	407[d]	2,576
1984	1,939	657	[c]	2,596
1985	1,295	733	851[e]	2,879
1986	923	1,009	866	2,798
1987	1,006	1,028	912	2,946
1988	1,066	1,067	906	3,039
1989	1,139	997	1,122	3,258
1990	1,273	1,102	1,193	3,568
1991	1,358	1,182	1,183	3,723
1992	1,410	1,248	1,180	3,838
1993	1,321	1,005	1,554	3,880
1994	[c]	[c]	[c]	3,978[f]
1995	[c]	[c]	[c]	4,078[f]

(Table notes on next page)

[a]Enrollment is the number of participants who complete 12 or more program hours, with each participant reported only once, regardless of the number of classes or programs attended during the program year reported.

[b]All enrollments were in the Adult Basic Education category.

[c]Data not available.

[d]According to Department of Education officials, these data are incomplete for fiscal years 1977-1984 and represent only a portion of ESL enrollment. No federal requirement for states to report enrollment data existed during this time.

[e]Fiscal year 1985 was the first year ESL was reported as a separate instructional category.

[f]Projected.

Source: U.S. Department of Education.

Table I.4: State Grant Program, State Expenditure and Enrollment Data, Fiscal Year 1991

Dollars in thousands

State	Expenditures			State match (percent)[b]	Enrollment (program year 1991/92)
	Federal	State and local[a]	Federal, state, and local		
Alabama	$4,107	$3,026	$7,133	42	49,510
Alaska	446	1,761	2,207	80	6,046
Arizona	2,138	3,040	5,178	59	33,805
Arkansas	2,589	12,337	14,926	83	38,135
California	16,631	282,767	299,398	95	1,023,899
Colorado	1,919	812	2,731	30	15,890
Connecticut	2,568	16,689	19,257	87	54,588
Delaware	704	239	943	25	3,126
District of Columbia	791	4,221	5,012	84	20,732
Florida	8,463	58,079	66,542	87	436,870
Georgia	5,658	2,601	8,259	31	85,794
Hawaii	854	1,934	2,788	69	56,873
Idaho	858	234	1,092	21	9,611
Illinois	9,470	7,046	16,516	43	88,815
Indiana	4,638	23,726	28,364	84	51,134
Iowa	2,293	3,741	6,034	62	40,371
Kansas	1,836	500	2,336	21	12,936
Kentucky	4,122	2,537	6,659	38	34,255
Louisiana	4,201	6,918	11,119	62	45,857
Maine	1,112	4,999	6,111	82	17,339
Maryland	3,621	3,977	7,598	52	33,829

(continued)

Dollars in thousands

State	Expenditures			State match (percent)[b]	Enrollment (program year 1991/92)
	Federal	State and local[a]	Federal, state, and local		
Massachusetts	4,260	9,622	13,882	69	21,085
Michigan	7,364	183,605	190,969	96	219,306
Minnesota	2,960	14,694	17,654	83	45,348
Mississippi	2,773	845	3,618	23	21,244
Missouri	4,533	2,535	7,068	36	38,742
Montana	759	616	1,375	45	6,333
Nebraska	1,279	345	1,624	21	7,314
Nevada	772	474	1,246	38	19,230
New Hampshire	886	717	1,603	45	6,949
New Jersey	5,790	20,701	26,491	78	61,364
New Mexico	1,221	1,577	2,798	56	30,514
New York	14,703	31,143	45,846	68	197,865
North Carolina	6,309	21,112	27,421	77	126,698
North Dakota	745	425	1,170	36	3,642
Ohio	8,817	6,987	15,804	44	120,529
Oklahoma	2,595	702	3,297	21	30,501
Oregon	1,935	11,756	13,691	86	38,409
Pennsylvania	9,673	9,283	18,956	49	50,797
Rhode Island	1,122	1,568	2,690	58	8,926
South Carolina	3,457	10,354	13,811	75	103,041
South Dakota	769	291	1,060	27	3,849
Tennessee	4,893	1,369	6,262	22	58,896
Texas	12,744	8,653	21,397	40	224,037
Utah	972	4,110	5,082	81	26,609
Vermont	607	2,495	3,102	80	5,977
Virginia	5,049	5,018	10,067	50	31,397
Washington	2,738	7,646	10,384	74	37,331
West Virginia	2,207	1,292	3,499	37	26,113
Wisconsin	3,705	7,089	10,794	66	80,455
Wyoming	516	308	824	37	4,203

Note: According to the Department of Education, this is the most recent year for which complete expenditure data are available.

[a]Obligation authority was from July 1, 1991, to June/September 30, 1993.

[b]State match reflects state and local expenditures as a percentage of total expenditures.

Source: U.S. Department of Education.

Table I.5: State Grant Program Enrollment by Instructional Area, Fiscal Year 1993

State	Enrollment	Adult Basic Education (percent)	Adult Secondary Education (percent)	English as a Second Language (percent)
Alabama	52,132	72	24	4
Alaska	5,822	57	3	40
Arizona	44,828	31	26	43
Arkansas	45,045	58	39	3
California	1,126,731	10	6	84
Colorado	12,732	36	31	33
Connecticut	49,334	21	42	37
Delaware	3,323	62	12	26
District of Columbia	16,505	39	26	35
Florida	425,852	33	40	27
Georgia	84,516	55	28	17
Hawaii	59,034	33	35	32
Idaho	9,566	62	23	15
Illinois	83,153	27	20	53
Indiana	51,884	54	39	7
Iowa	38,072	62	27	11
Kansas	14,910	63	20	17
Kentucky	33,485	65	26	9
Louisiana	39,485	51	44	5
Maine	18,468	39	54	7
Maryland	33,004	26	60	14
Massachusetts	22,718	39	26	35
Michigan	193,027	25	65	10
Minnesota	42,232	46	25	29
Mississippi	21,752	79	17	4
Missouri	38,845	72	16	12
Montana	6,453	60	37	3
Nebraska	7,178	67	10	24
Nevada	16,853	5	79	16
New Hampshire	7,144	41	41	18
New Jersey	62,132	28	32	40
New Mexico	30,273	42	36	22
New York	191,349	44	20	36
North Carolina	128,147	54	35	11
North Dakota	3,582	52	31	17
Ohio	116,627	73	16	11

(continued)

State	Enrollment	Adult Basic Education (percent)	Adult Secondary Education (percent)	English as a Second Language (percent)
Oklahoma	30,072	65	22	13
Oregon	39,365	29	39	32
Pennsylvania	52,963	53	25	22
Rhode Island	7,089	47	24	29
South Carolina	104,009	38	60	2
South Dakota	4,263	65	26	9
Tennessee	57,310	67	26	7
Texas	209,871	36	27	37
Utah	27,770	16	72	12
Vermont	5,095	90	5	5
Virginia	32,106	41	28	31
Washington	39,409	43	16	41
West Virginia	25,866	68	30	2
Wisconsin	75,542	63	26	11
Wyoming	3,742	46	39	15

Source: U.S. Department of Education

Comments From the Department of Education

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL AND ADULT EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

JUL 28 1995

Ms. Linda G. Morra
Director, Education and Employment Issues
United States General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Morra:

This is in response to your July 18, 1995 letter to Secretary Riley, requesting comments on the General Accounting Office (GAO) draft report entitled, "ADULT EDUCATION: Measuring Program Results Has Been Challenging" (GAO/HEHS-95-153). The Secretary has asked me to respond to your request since the report addresses programs and activities authorized under the Adult Education Act.

The Department of Education is strongly committed to serving the basic education and literacy needs of the Nation's adults. In support of this commitment, the Department, working in concert with the States, has implemented a number of program improvement strategies that are having a positive impact on the delivery of adult education and literacy services.

Our current activities include: 1) the development of an individualized student record keeping system for use by local program providers and States; 2) moving toward an outcomes-based national data collection system, including a computerized management information system to monitor data quality; 3) conducting evaluations of delivery systems, effective practice, assessment, and performance measurement; 4) systematic technical assistance in the design and use of performance measures and standards built around the indicators of program quality developed by States in response to the National Literacy Act of 1991; and 5) development of training programs to be used at the national, State, and local levels to train adult education personnel in the collection, analysis, and reporting of student and program data.

400 MARYLAND AVE., S.W. WASHINGTON, D.C. 20202-7100

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The report provides some excellent background information on adult education. The report also raises three issues that are of critical importance for improving accountability in adult education and other Federal programs related to education and training: the need for clarity of purpose and expectation, the importance of good assessment instruments, and quality data. We are committed to continuing to address these issues while at the same time giving States and communities the flexibility to meet important priorities and individual needs.

As you note in your report, the Adult Education Act establishes three major objectives for adult learners. These varied objectives provide the States flexibility to set priorities reflective of State needs and also to meet the multiple goals of individual learners. However, this flexibility does present a challenge to using performance indicators and measures to judge effectiveness beyond the walls of individual classrooms. As the report points out, the Department has attempted to address this issue in a variety of ways, including developing a set of model indicators of program quality, developing a standardized evaluation framework States can use to evaluate local programs, and implementing initiatives to improve data collection.

We agree there are problems regarding student assessment instruments for adult education as well as for other employment and training programs providing services to adults. The most prominent of these are: 1) the limited number of assessment instruments currently available for adult use, 2) the inappropriate use of various assessments, and 3) the varied intensity and quality of teacher training in test administration and analysis. We are currently addressing the appropriate use of assessment instruments and the training provided adult teachers through a technical assistance initiative. One important improvement is that the latest edition of the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) and the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) are both normed on adults.

We particularly want to address the issue of student data. Clearly, it is important that policy makers and program operators have data they can rely on. Yet we recognize the difficulties inherent in collecting and aggregating program and individual student data at the State level. States that do the very best job of collecting data tend to: 1) have computerized individual student record keeping systems, 2) base state funding allocations on reported program data, and 3) invest in training for local program personnel. We are currently investing resources to model and disseminate the effective practices of these States.

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The Department believes that "Quality Indicators" recently adopted by all States provide the framework for a sound performance management system. The indicators on recruitment, retention, and individual student learning gains, also adopted by all States, provide a common framework for program accountability.

The Administration recently forwarded to the Congress the Adult Education and Family Literacy Reform Act of 1995 (H.R. 1605 - S 797). This legislative initiative contains a number of strong accountability features, including a set of clear performance goals that can be developed around a State's quality indicators and an incentive program that rewards program performance.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this draft report. My staff and I would be pleased to discuss these comments further if you or your representatives have further questions.

Sincerely,

Patricia W. McNeil
Acting Assistant Secretary

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